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# Conceptualisation of a Professional Doctorate Program: Focusing on Practice and Change

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## Abstract

*Professional doctorates are frequently described as research degrees that combine workplace and professional engagement with the scholarly rigour of the university. This paper draws on findings from an empirical study of a professional doctorate program in nursing. During this study, a curriculum model that focuses on the intersecting spheres of university, profession and workplace was used as a prompt in interviews. Although this curriculum model has become a reference point for any discussion about the framework for professional doctorates in Australia, it became clear during the study that the predominant themes in the nursing program were different to those in the model. The disparity between the accepted model and the findings from the nursing program are discussed and an alternative model is offered. In this alternative model, the university retains its central role, combined with the themes of professional practice and change. These themes provide a curriculum framework that reflects the knowledge, experiences and intentions of both the students and the staff. The broader implications of the alternative model are also discussed.*

## Introduction

Since professional doctorates appeared on the higher education landscape in the late 1980s and 1990s, they have emerged as a potent force in the doctoral degree landscape. In Australia between 1996 and 2000 the total number of professional doctorate programs doubled, with particular growth in the areas of health, psychology and administration (Maxwell and Shanahan 2001). Professional doctorates have proven to be attractive to senior professional practitioners and, as a result, enrolments are soaring, both in Australia (McWilliam et al. 2002) and in the United Kingdom (Bourner, Bowden and Laing 2001). It is expected that the growth in research in

professional fields will continue to increase as these professional fields develop their own research capacity (Pearson 1999).

In efforts to conceptualise professional doctorates as something more than structurally different PhDs, and in efforts to link their value to government agendas and industry requirements, they have been framed as research degrees that combine workplace and professional engagement with the scholarly rigour of the university. Discussions about professional doctorate programs commonly assume relationships and tensions that result from interplays between the students' various locations, experiences and reference groups. One representation of this relationship that has been widely taken up is Lee, Green and Brennan's (2000) concept of the hybrid curriculum, which centres on the three intersecting spheres of university, profession and workplace. This model has become a reference point for any discussion about the framework for professional doctorates in Australia.

Whilst acknowledging the history and context that led to the development of this model as a framework and discussion tool for students and supervisors of professional doctorate programs, I argue in this article that this representation needs rethinking. It appears now that the workplace is not accurately represented and the issue of 'what is the profession?' is not clear in such a model. Additionally, the implication that there are three overlapping fields of equal importance – university, workplace and profession – is not an appropriate way of representing either the norms of some current practices, or, I would argue, the key dimensions of these programs. More importantly, the intersecting area of 'university, workplace and profession' does not adequately represent the core of a professional doctorate program. A recent report on professional doctorates also calls for a re-examination of these terms and states:

The conflation of profession, workplace and industry is not helpful ...  
A debate about what each of these might mean in terms of knowledge production could be generative and help to 'unstick' some of the current orthodoxies. (McWilliam et al. 2002, p. 25)

This paper critiques the hybrid curriculum model and offers an alternative model, based on findings from an empirical study of a professional doctorate program. Whilst the pivotal place of the university remains, what that represents needs to be considered more broadly. The dominant themes of 'professional practice' and 'change' emerged as powerful components of the curriculum and represented the focus of both students and staff; 'professional practice' because it underpins all professional work and 'change' because, broadly speaking, issues of change are a core aspect of professional life.

## Background to the study

This discussion about the representations appropriate for a particular professional doctorate program draws on findings from an empirical study of a professional doctorate program in a large city-based university in Australia. The professional doctorate program was one of two doctoral programs studied ethnographically over 18 months. The intention of the research study was to focus on doctoral programs that explicitly link the theory and scholarship of the academy with the practice and professional knowledge of the workplace and community environment. An ethnographic study provided a broad framework not just to look at the embedded rules and policies but also to examine the more subtle changes and issues that emerged during the period of research and that were not necessarily evident at first glance. This approach also provided opportunities to examine information grounded in a specific context, and to follow-up new directions and new strategies. The research study was not an evaluation of programs, but rather a qualitative and contextualised investigation into research management, research supervision and research outcomes.

The professional doctorate program discussed in this paper, the Doctor of Nursing, had an enrolment of 30 students in 2001. The faculty offers both PhD and professional doctorate degrees, so it is important to note that this faculty has made an effort to differentiate between the two types of doctoral awards. All students, from both Australia and New Zealand, work full time or part time as nurse managers, health care professionals or nurse educators.

The research relied on interviews, course documents, participation in group doctoral sessions and staff meetings, as well as informal discussions with students and staff. These different methods helped ensure a rich picture of the context, although one limitation of this type of study is its inability to draw generalisable conclusions. However there is a need for deeper, contextualised studies of specific doctoral programs; this is supported by Pearson, who states that previous research trends have

led to insufficient attention to the way doctoral education proceeds within particular contexts and settings, and insufficient attention to the lived experience and perceptions of participants in specific research and learning environments. (1999, p. 270)

Therefore this research study aimed to investigate the program within its context and to also give attention to the experiences and perceptions of both staff and students. The findings may be useful for highlighting relevant issues for other programs, and may contribute to discussions about the broader issues of professional doctorate degrees.

During the study, the hybrid curriculum diagram (Figure 1) was used as a starting point and a prompt during interviews because it has been widely circulated and adopted as a representation of the three aspects that are seen to be at work in such doctoral programs. The research study did not set out to challenge the accepted model, but instead set out to explore what Lee, Green and Brennan describe the diagram as representing, that is,

where the university, the candidate's profession and the particular work-site of the research meet and intersect in specific and local ways, in the context of a specific organization. (2000, p. 127)

From interviews and discussions with both staff and students, as well as data collected from faculty meetings, faculty documents and staff discussions, it became clear that the Doctor of Nursing program provided challenges to the representation, and that other more powerful representations predominated. The university retained its dominant role, but there was little evidence of an equal relationship with the workplace. The workplace was not a dominating concern for the students, and their studies were not directed by it, although it was by no means irrelevant to them. The notion of profession was also not evident; instead, the concerns of both staff and students were far more focused on 'practice' and 'change'. The first part of the paper explores how the findings from the study of the Doctor of Nursing program were at odds with the representation in the hybrid curriculum model. The second half of the paper proposes a different representation, developed out of the findings. The implications of this alternative model are discussed.

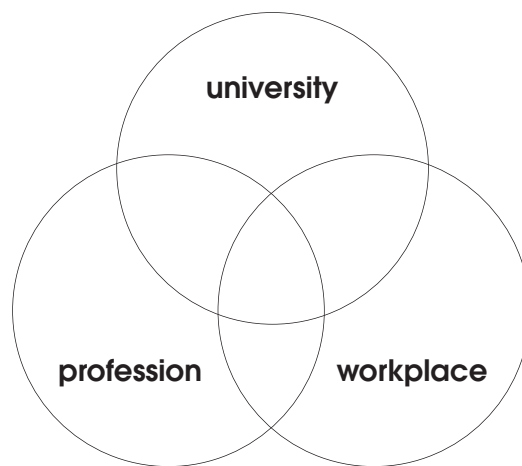
## **A critique of the hybrid curriculum**

The three intersecting circles highlight the multiple roles and positions held by a researcher operating within these spheres. They have been taken up as a representation of professional doctorates, particularly to highlight their differences from PhDs. The model, which draws heavily on the writings of Gibbons et al. (1994) and Scott (1997), signals that these degrees will offer opportunities for new knowledges and new ways of researching.

The authors of this model acknowledged that there is a need to investigate how these practices of knowledge generation unfold and suggested that it would be important to examine

the practices that emerge as doctoral candidates in different professional doctoral programmes negotiate relationships with the practice sites in which their research will be carried out, and to which it will in important ways be referenced; with the profession of which they are a member; with

the idea of professionalism itself; and with the university, still the primary credentialing body and still the custodian of the doctoral enterprise. (Lee, Green and Brennan 2000, p. 125)



**Figure 1: The hybrid curriculum of the professional doctorate  
(Lee, Green and Brennan 2000, p. 127)**

The research study discussed in this paper examined the emerging practices in a particular site, and the following section outlines in more detail the three sectors of the hybrid curriculum, in relation to both the original model and to the curriculum and practices of the professional doctorate in nursing.

### **University**

There is little disagreement that the university remains the dominant sphere of influence and control in professional doctorate programs, just as it is in PhD programs. The overriding influence of the university is supported in a major study recently completed on professional doctorates in Australia (McWilliam et al. 2002).

The professional doctorate program in this study was created by leading academics in the faculty in response to the perceived need for nurses to have access to a research degree that was different from the PhD. The aim was to have a degree for professional practitioners that encouraged workplace research, but also developed in students a strong theoretical understanding of the importance of good leadership skills and of both policy and international frameworks and issues. As one senior academic said, it was an 'unashamedly political initiative to produce future health leaders' (interview, 28 August 2001).

The university has a dominant role throughout the program. University governance determines admission, progression, examination procedures, supervision, codes of practice and so on throughout the degree. University staff administer student matters and academics provide the research seminars, which are a four or five day session every semester. Academic staff assess the coursework components and research students are required to represent their work in the style of the academy. The program is conducted on university premises. Guest presenters at the coursework session are usually academic staff, either overseas guests or university staff. One concession to this dominance is the jointly funded positions with various Area Health Services held by some of the academic staff at this university. These academics are able to provide a link to professional associations and workplace organisations, as well as the usual academic representation.

Additionally, it could be argued that the representation of the university means more than setting the parameters and providing the structures for the doctoral study. The university also represents a space removed from the workplace for research students to learn about and reflect on their workplace practices and experiences. The importance of this becomes more apparent in the alternative representation offered later in the paper.

### **Profession**

It is unclear exactly how the notion of profession is to be understood in this 'hybrid curriculum', although in the article that originally explored it references are made to both engagement with professional organisations as well as the notion of professionalism (Lee, Green and Brennan 2000). According to Maxwell and Shanahan's (2001) recent overview of these degrees, there is currently a lack of formal professional representation or involvement in any aspect of professional doctorate degrees. There are isolated examples of professional engagement and direction (see for example, the EngD in the UK: Scott et al. 2002, or the DPsych degree: Helmes 2001) but, generally speaking, formal professional involvement in professional doctorates has not emerged as a strong influence.

Consistent with this, there is no evidence that the associated professional organisations are providing strong guidance or involvement in the planning and teaching of the program discussed in this paper. The nursing students made references to the different professional organisations during discussions about policies and organisational responsibilities; however, there was no sense that the professional organisations were linked to the degree. In this study, the only sense of professional involvement in the program was that the students, as well as the staff, see themselves as associated with, or as part of, the profession of nursing and health care.

In a later discussion of the conceptualisation model, the inclusion of profession is explained as serving to acknowledge the importance of professional knowledge, and of undermining

the privileging of knowledge of universities exemplified by academic research production. The latter continues to have its place, certainly, but professionals themselves have created a wide body of knowledge upon which they draw to make decisions in their workplace, and that effectively cuts across disciplines. (Maxwell, Shanahan and Green 2001, p. 5)

This later version of how profession might be interpreted is more in line with what was prevalent in the professional doctorates discussed in this paper, as it recognises the students' background of disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge, work histories and a way of working that underpins professional expertise. This, in turn, relates closely to the core concepts of professionalism, which Eraut (1994) describes as specialist knowledge base, autonomy and service. The notion that a professional has a body of specialist knowledge that informs practice is central to any framework for a professional doctorate. However it is not sufficient by itself; the high degree of decision making and autonomy that underpins professional work is particularly relevant to nursing. The notion of service as a component of professionalism is important because it recognises the relationships with others, and the consequent power relations (Watts 2000).

In this study, there was evidence not of profession but of professional knowledge and of professionalism. However these concepts did not truly represent the focus of the curriculum and the desires of the students. The emphasis proposed here, and discussed more fully in the suggested alternative representation, is not on profession or professional knowledge (both static terms) but rather on professional practice, which is of course grounded in professional knowledge, and contextualised within places of work and ways of working. The focus on practice rather than just on knowledge is firmly advocated by both staff and students.

### **Workplace**

The workplace has been viewed as central to a conceptualisation of professional doctorates because it offers a site for contextualised research. Students have been attracted to these programs because they acknowledge the complexities of situated practices and offer opportunities for professionals to research their own practice, as evidenced by the increases in enrolments. It appears, however, that the workplace has not emerged as an equal partner in the way professional doctorate programs are experienced.

Whilst most professional doctorate students conduct research either in their workplace or about their workplace, there seems little justification in representing it as a major influence in the curriculum of professional doctorates. The workplace largely serves as a site for research, but without a deep investment in the process. This is in spite of staff from the various work sites sometimes being asked to be involved in the research, and ethics approval sometimes needing to be sought. This lack of deep workplace engagement has emerged as a common characteristic of many professional doctorate programs and is cited in the recent Australian review of professional doctoral programs:

Our finding is that the overwhelming majority of viable Australian professional doctorate programs exhibit a surface level linkage with the professional body/ies and/or industry with which they claim to engage. (McWilliam et al. 2002, p. 100)

Reflecting this, the Doctor of Nursing program in this study had no appointments of workplace managers as co-supervisors. There was also little evidence of joint negotiation of research topics. It was clear during the study that the topics were decided on through the interest of the students, not through the need of the work institution (although, of course, these could overlap). University-based supervisors did not seem to feel it was necessary to visit or meet students at the workplace, and all formal activities took place on the university campus. The exceptions were those supervisors who held a joint position at the workplace institution; they interacted with workplace staff and also conducted research meetings at the site.

Instead, in this study, students spoke of the mistrust by workplace staff towards the university and they reported that there was often an anti-intellectual environment in their workplace. A senior academic spoke about nurses' preference for 'doing over thinking' and the tradition of anti-intellectualism that occurs in workplace settings (interview, 21 August 2001). This is supported by similar comments from an industry-based director of a knowledge management business, in discussing a group discussion list between industry and university staff, who stated 'Some of the people ... just delete anything from the university because they know that that is not going to be terribly helpful' (McWilliam et al. 2002, p. 96). This resistance within workplaces towards university research and its relevance is just one of the many factors that contributes to the workplace's secondary role.



## Reconceptualising the framework of a professional doctorate program

It is clear from the previous discussion that the findings from the study of the program did not seem congruent with the representation proposed by Lee, Green and Brennan (2000). During analysis of the data, other themes emerged as more powerful, and more indicative of the intellectual drivers behind this professional doctorate program. These themes were driven by the students, as much as by the staff.

Therefore, drawing on these dominant themes, an alternative representation is offered (Figure 2) for the Doctor of Nursing. The previously loosely defined area of influence 'profession', is refined and more tightly defined as 'professional practice'. The emphasis on 'practice' is important and signifies the sense of action that underlies the third circle: 'change'. The concept of change was a recurring theme throughout the study, and reflects both the intentions of the program and the preoccupations of the researchers. 'Workplace' has been dropped because, although the research was situated in the workplace, it serves more as a background theme, over which the themes of professional practice and change predominated.



**Figure 2: Conceptual model of the professional doctorate in nursing**

### University

The university remained the only constant theme and possibly the most dominant. Despite government pressures to build a stronger alliance between industry organisations and the university, the roles and responsibilities of the university remain paramount. It stands for the disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge that

underpins the inquiry comprising the doctoral project. Whilst the need to maintain the university as a primary element in this representation is unquestioned, the role played by the university is not deemed immutable. Indeed, university researchers themselves are questioning and critiquing the role of the university and exploring the changes being experienced. For example, Scott et al. (2002) highlight the types of new knowledges being used to research situated practices in different professional doctorate programs. Malfroy and Yates (2003) report on the changes to research writing and the different sorts of texts being produced in doctoral portfolios, the strong sense of collective research supervision, and new types of research outcomes for doctoral study.

The continuing significance of the university is usually explained by the structures, teaching staff and academic expectations about quality of work. Perhaps the hitherto unrecognised aspect of the university role is that it also provides a place for students to withdraw from their workplace, in order to research and critically reflect on their own professional practice. This was evident during the doctoral sessions, when students appreciated the opportunity to come away from their workplace in order to learn more about it. Particularly for those students who want to take a critical approach towards researching their workplace, the university offers greater academic freedom, instead of institutional pressure from a workplace supervisor. In light of students' perceptions of the disinterest of work colleagues through to a distrust of 'university' knowledge, this capacity to provide a (often virtual) place away from work needs to be more fully appreciated. The importance of this aspect becomes even more obvious when the following spheres of influence are discussed.

### **Professional practice**

The term 'professional practice' abounds throughout documents and articles on professional doctorates, and it is often the single most important drawcard for students choosing to do this type of degree. The concept of professional practice was not excluded from the hybrid curriculum model, but rather subsumed within the notion of 'profession'. The study in this paper provided strong evidence that this should be reconceptualised, with professional practice becoming a core component of a model for professional doctorates.

The prominence of the notion 'professional practice' is evident in course documents for the Doctor of Nursing program. These documents provide useful insights into the objectives of the program and the underlying values and desires of the designers of the degree. In the course information document, the specific program objectives list the types of capabilities that graduates will demonstrate, and the word 'practice' appears in nearly every capability. As one would expect, there are references to professional nursing practice, but the emphasis on 'practice' also comes through in other references, such as

authority and ability to respond to the real world of practice...; assess the practice environment...; draw out the implications for practice...; articulate practice concerns... (D Nursing, Information to Prospective Candidates 2001, p. 3)

It is clear that the authors of this document acknowledge the relevance and strength of the concept of professional practice. In interviews with those authors, it was clear that one of their main objectives was not so much recognition by professional organisations, but rather to provide a program that offered professionals an opportunity to become leaders of their profession, and to do this through scholarly research and improved understanding of the policies and practices of senior health professionals. Students also stated that they did not want just to do research that stayed largely within the confines of a traditional thesis. They stated that they had intentionally opted for a professional doctorate program because they either wanted to investigate an aspect of their practice, they wanted to improve their practice, or wanted to better understand their practice, within the context of a workplace and professional setting. Rather than framing doctoral work as a 'contribution to knowledge', one student added 'I want to make theory accessible where it matters' (group discussion, 27 September 2001).

Rather than a focus on profession, there was substantial evidence from discussions with students in the doctoral sessions that they conceived of their goals in terms of professional practice. Whilst these students were well grounded in the highly specialised clinical side of nursing, they also wanted to acknowledge the 'messy' world of practice (Schon 1983), in particular the world of complex decision making, organisational management, rationalisation of resources, careful management of colleagues and workers and so on. Students spoke about the development of their professional practice skills in terms of 'developing leading edge practice', 'turning theory into practice', 'changed thinking' and 'making theory accessible where it counts' (doctoral session, 28 September 2001). The real preoccupation of these researchers is not the theory of workplace practice but the theory of their discipline and how it is mediated in work contexts. The students referred to it more as a commitment to reshaping the professions and communities of which they are part.

Framing any doctoral program, whether a professional doctorate or PhD, in a context of workplace practice immediately sets it apart from research that is conducted within the university. The implications are substantial. For a start, there is the relationship between the workplace and the university to be considered, involving complex issues of authority/power, organisational dynamics, ethical dilemmas, the usefulness of the findings to the workplace once the degree has been completed and the problem solving mechanisms when things go wrong. There are also questions about

epistemology and methodology: decisions about what counts as knowledge, how it needs to be produced, and how it should be validated. However, for professional doctorate students the complexities and tensions run even deeper, as the students generally continue to act in their senior positions in the workplace whilst undertaking the research. Their own identity and position is at stake in the doctoral process, and will certainly change during the process of research; there is the potential for the repercussions to be profound.

It was clear during the 18-month study of the nursing program that both students and supervisors struggled with the tensions inherent in integrating research and practice. Part of that struggle was to do with finding ways of framing research that both satisfied the expectations of the academic community and at the same time suited the situations of a particular site and the expectations of the student. In exploring the inherent tensions, Brennan (1998, p. 79), in describing Bourdieu's work on practice, states 'The logic of such efforts to analyse, describe and develop theoretical models of practice ... is in direct contrast to the "fuzzy" logic of practice which is always situational, embodied and tacit.'

These struggles continue to be part of the dialectical tensions in researching professional practice and appear to inherently require research that is contextualised, and research that acknowledges the socialised practices of the context, the (trans)disciplinary knowledge of the field as well as the tacit and intuitive knowledge that underpins the practices. The central placement of professional practice puts what is important to students at the core of the curriculum, whilst still allowing for relationships with workplaces and professions.

## **Change**

The concept of change and transformation emerged as a subtle theme during the period of study, in contrast to the university/academic and professional practice themes, which were more overt. However, in many ways, it is this theme that may end up being the most powerful. The concept of change was evident in the way in which the degree was framed, the coursework subjects, the research topics and the intentions and identities of the students.

The academics who designed the professional doctorate in this study saw this program as training future leaders for the nursing profession. In order to provide the kind of intellectual development perceived as useful for leaders in nursing, there are three coursework subjects that focus on leadership, international frames and health care policy. The course documents for the Doctor of Nursing program also represent the degree as providing a forum in which to critique and challenge current health care policies and institutions. This is conceptually a big shift away from the idea of representing profession and workplace. The document makes no claim that professional bodies will be directly involved in the program, but rather states:

The transformation of practice through research and development requires individuals who are prepared to critique institutional practices that influence and impact on their work.... Nursing leaders need to be equipped to look beyond current health care practices to the issues and challenges of the future and to be involved in the construction of appropriate health policy directions. (D Nursing, Information to Prospective Candidates 2001, p. 2)

The intentions stated above reflect the intentions of the students. In the program studied here, most students wanted to improve their work through research, in other words to either bring about a change, or to reflect on change, in their workplace. The types of change were varied, as well as the underlying motivations for change. In some cases the motivation was political; for example, one student referred to the type of knowledge being produced in the degree as transformative and sustainable knowledge, to be used for decision making and political ends. Another student's motivation was primarily to improve the processes and care of patients in a specific day clinic. Others were more reflective about their own leadership and decision-making processes during major changes they had introduced into a department. Another student wanted to look at the future of nursing care and the implications for nursing education. Throughout all the variations, however, the overall theme of change was apparent. This sense of action-oriented knowledge production is central to the professional doctorate in nursing.

Including change as a key theme in the curriculum of a professional doctorate allows for a much broader and more encompassing representation than the one offered by Lee, Green and Brennan. Change covers not only the activities of the research but also the identity of the researcher. Acknowledging the situatedness of the researcher is a central aspect of researching practice, and it is therefore appropriate that the curricula should include an analysis of the politico-ideological nature of professionals, within their own contexts (Seddon 2001).

Therefore this critical subjectivity stance, in which the assumptions, values and processes of the researcher themselves become the subject of the research, is an important component of professional doctorate research. This creates a tension, because most professionals are so well integrated into their own professional culture that they find it difficult to stand back and trace their own acculturation processes. During this study, a visiting lecturer (doctoral session, 29 September 2001) spoke about a strategy to overcome this singular positioning by taking up two positions, as both an insider and as an outsider, and argued that students doing this kind of research need to engage in 'hermeneutic to-ing and fro-ing'.

The result of a critical subjectivity stance can also bring about a change in the identity of the researcher. During one doctoral session, seven students were asked what they expected to gain from the degree. All spoke of expected changes within themselves. For example, they referred to an increased ability to communicate with a broader range of people, increased responsibility over others in the workplace, and increased leadership roles (group session, 28 September 2001). These outcomes align with the intentions of this particular program, and with others who argue that

what is at stake in doctoral work and postgraduate supervision, over and beyond the much-vaunted contribution to knowledge, is precisely the (re)production of an intelligible academic identity – a certain kind of (licensed) personage. (Green and Lee 1999, p. 219)

Therefore, through a concept such as ‘change’, the curriculum is able to move from a study of professional and institutional change through to operational change and even personal change. Not all students will cover all aspects, but it seems clear that this theme carries with it the underlying sense of excitement and inquiry that can make doctoral study so rewarding for both students and supervisors.

## **Implications and conclusion**

It appears that the anticipated relationships with workplaces have not eventuated and will continue, I suspect, to be problematic whilst professional doctorates continue to frame ‘workplace’ as an equal partner. Perhaps if we stopped thinking of workplace/industry as an entity, and instead looked at the professional workers in those entities and the roles they play, then we would have a more realistic notion about what professional doctorates can achieve. It is also possible that the weaker influence of workplace and profession may be because these programs are still in a transitional stage – perhaps new and integrated relationships will emerge in time. Currently, it seems that the terms ‘workplace’ and ‘profession’ are mainly used to attract students and to appease government and industry forces.

The alternative model proposed here has value because it acknowledges the dominant themes that underpin the curriculum and the research projects. The model also aims to line up more closely with the features of professional practice/knowledge – that is, that the influences and activities are situated more within a practice field than in a place, and are more concerned with policy change or a range of types of intervention. This is in contrast to the original representation, which instead offers a static representation of those institutions with a vested interest in the degree.

In order to contribute to the debate about professional doctorates, I have chosen to depict the alternative model within the framework of three intersecting circles, as in the original representation, in order to capture the change in focus. However, I acknowledge that this spherical model has limitations: it is perhaps too static and presents the different spheres as having an equal role. As more programs review their own conceptual frameworks, it may be that alternative models are put forward that are not as static in their representation.

The alternative model proposed in this paper reinforces the challenges for professional doctorate supervisors and students. In particular, it conceptualises the dialectical tension that underpins a professional doctorate program and professional doctorate research, that is, the epistemological challenge of researching professional practice and representing it in a way that is acceptable to examiners of an academic degree. This challenge means that it is important to be clear about what sort of academic production is aimed for in professional doctorates, and important to retain a clear sense of a commitment to 'systematic and disciplined inquiry' (Seddon 2001, p. 331).

By focusing on these reconceptualised dimensions of the professional doctorate, the essence of any curriculum is clearer. By examining the nature of professional practice, researchers will focus on the practices and processes of their work (as they have been doing in the Doctor of Nursing). As explained earlier, this will include the disciplinary knowledges, as well as transdisciplinary knowledges, to further explore issues that are relevant to their senior positions as decision makers and leaders; issues about power, conceptions of nursing, decision making, values, ethics, as well as relationships with others. The curriculum allows students the learning space to read widely, exchange ideas with peers and to critically reflect on their work.

The other aspect of the curriculum, that of 'change', allows students to examine these practices either through the intention of making a change, reflecting on changes as they are introduced into the workplace, or anticipating changes for the future. How that work is transferred back into the workplace, as well as the universities, will depend largely on the types of texts or materials that are produced during the research process, the way in which they are circulated, as well as the type of people who graduate from the degree.

Whilst the alternative model offered here still allows for workplaces and professions to experience deeper engagement than is currently the practice in doctoral study, it takes away the prominent place of those associated institutions in the conceptualisation of a (hybrid) curriculum. It matches the stated government conceptions of a degree that focuses on professional engagement, and it confirms the role of the university as a place for scholarly inquiry, but places that inquiry within a



new context – one of professional practice and professional change, both workplace-based and personal. This, in turn, may well bring about a re-culturing of research higher degrees (Seddon 1999). Already we have found that professional doctorates have contributed much to a reconceptualisation of doctoral study generally. Previously, there has been some concern that professional doctorates have been framed more in terms of their value to fields outside the university, rather than for any intrinsic value they may offer to knowledge production within universities themselves (Brennan 1998). The alternative model provides opportunities for these values to sit squarely within the university, as well as in the field of professional practice.

Whilst the alternative model has been developed after close study of only one program, there is every likelihood that other professional doctorate programs will have similar focuses. It will be useful if this paper merely opens up the debate again about the conceptual underpinnings of professional doctorates. The timing is particularly ripe, considering the findings from the recent study of professional doctorate programs in Australia (McWilliam et al. 2002). As shown by this study, the Doctor of Nursing offers a program that may have the support of professional bodies and workplace organisations, but is more strongly focused on professional practice and change.

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